**Orana -- an Australian welcome for a Polynesian word?**

Many of us who remember the 1960s in Australia know the chorus ‘Orana! Orana! Orana to Christmas Day’ in one of the popular Australianised seasonal songs of the period. The lyricist of ‘Carol of the Birds’, ABC staff writer John Wheeler (fl. 1940–70, with composer William Garnet ‘Billy’ James 1892–1977), likely found the word *Orana* in one of the notorious naming booklets popular at the time: *Orana*, ‘welcome’, has been listed in many of them as an Aboriginal word of NSW, beginning with Thorpe (1921:5) but followed by many others (see table below). The carol in question was in the first set of *Five Australian Christmas carols*, released for Christmas 1948, which implies that Wheeler’s source was one of the Thorpe or Tyrrell booklets published before WWII. It may well have been that, to Wheeler, ‘Orana’ in the chorus had an appealing resonance with the Biblical ‘Hosanna’.

In the 1970s *Orana* got another boost in New South Wales, from official naming:

**ORANA**, an Aboriginal word meaning ‘welcome’ and, since 1972, the name of a region in New South Wales. The Orana Region (formerly North–Western Region) covers roughly the central third of the State’s northern half. (*The Australian Encyclopaedia*)

Thereupon a number of business names in the region incorporated *Orana*, and its ‘capital’, Dubbo, has the Orana Mall—the premier shopping centre in the Central West … servicing the Region since 1979’, claims the Mall’s website. As it happens, the Geographical Names Board of NSW has since 2007 been considering the formalisation of ‘Orana’ as a NSW region name, but has not yet approved it.

The next development was that Wiradjuri, the language of the country around Dubbo, was somehow taken to be the source of the word:

The *Orana*, meaning ‘Welcome’ in Wiradjuri, is the largest and most diverse region in the State.

However, I have not been able to find any Australian record of *Orana* other than in those 1920s booklets. Salutations are not usual in Australian languages (that is, the languages usually don’t have a word that is primarily a salutation); in particular, the 19th century Wiradjuri wordlists don’t have a match for *Orana*, and Wiradjuri words typically don’t begin with a vowel. These days Wiradjuri people use *gawaymbanha* ‘welcome, tell to come’.

In the 1970s *Orana* got another boost in New South Wales, from official naming:
You may well detect a rather Oceanic flavour about this issue. First of all, David Nash’s lead article on the origin of Orana takes us to the Pacific. Then Jan Tent guides us through the pronunciation of Oceanic placenames. (We haven’t forgotten Part 2 of Paul Geraghty’s exploration of the Fijian island of Taveuni: that will come in September.) Page 10 sees another item in our new series, ‘We Thought You’d Never Ask’—after treating Woolloomooloo in our previous issue, Jeremy Steele has given us Bondi this time. What other placenames have you often wondered about? We eagerly await requests!

David Blair
<editor@anps.org.au>

We recommend...

In a book just published last month, David Nash has a chapter which will be of interest to many of our readers: ‘Placenames evidence for NSW Pidgin: Bulga, Nyrang’. The book is Loss and renewal: Australian languages since colonisation, edited by Felicity Meakins and Carmel O’Shannessy (published by De Gruyter Mouton).

And Joshua Nash (no relation!) has given ANPS a copy of his beautifully illustrated booklet on the placenames of Norfolk Island. It’s waiting here for the first reader to email the Editor! For everyone else, there’s a PDF version on the ANPS website, to download:


Notes and queries

Dolls Point

We were asked in one of our ABC radio sessions about the origin of Dolls Point, a feature on the shore of Botany Bay and now the name of the nearby suburb. We’re aware of an old story that the point was named after an escaped convict who hid in the area, but we can’t substantiate this. The first record of the name is on a survey plan in 1833. If the convict story has any basis in fact, that document plan would narrow the date down to the time of transportation. Records show that there were at least three convicts surnamed Doll who arrived in Sydney between 1806 and 1822 (two named John and one named Samuel), so perhaps this suggested origin is not really so far-fetched. If you know any more, do let us know!

Penwhaupell

Our reader Lyn Grimes has asked about Penwhaupell, a locality in Queensland. It began as a large property taken up by Thomas Gray in 1896 when it probably already bore that name. We’ve located several contemporary newspaper reports of Thomas Gray and his property, but nothing about the earlier stage. We wonder if the name was ‘transported’ from an earlier landowner’s home in Cornwall or Wales—we (and Lyn) would appreciate any suggestions!

The Canning saga continues...

The Australian Electoral Commission says the Canning electorate (WA) was named after surveyor Alfred Canning. A sceptical Ian Murray wrote to say that he believed that all the Canning toponyms (district and river included) honoured George Canning, Prime Minister of England. But we now have further correspondence from the West: Alex George believes that the Canning River and the City of Canning were named after Charles John Canning, the son of PM George Canning. As part evidence, he tells us that the city’s coat of arms is adopted from the arms of Charles Canning, not from those of his father.
What you see is not always what you get
or, a brief lesson in how to pronounce some toponyms from the Pacific

Oceanic languages (of which Fijian is one) tend not to have as many vowels and consonants as English. But some of the consonant sounds they have can be quite different to English ones. And unlike English, they tend to have a relatively simple and regular syllable structure, e.g. (Vowel) + Consonant + Vowel.\(^2\) (I am talking here about pronunciation, not spelling!). This means a word may consist of a vowel by itself, two vowels or three (e.g. Hiva Oa and Uea), or start with a vowel followed by a consonant and another vowel (Ofu), or start with a consonant followed by a vowel. The latter two sequences may extend over a number of syllables (Ovalau, Moturiki). There tend to be no clusters of consonants (i.e. sequences of consonants without an intervening vowel) as we have in English.

Fijian, like many Melanesian and African languages, also has what are called ‘prenasalised stops’. This means that the stop sounds /b/, /d/, and /ɡ/ generally have a nasal sound preceding them, giving /m/b/, /n/d/ and /ŋɡ/ (the /ŋ/ being the nasal sound we hear in the English word sing). These sounds are not considered to be, for example, /m/ + /b/ consonant clusters, but single sounds. You hear the nasal, but it is perceived to be part of the stop sound, so they are rendered in the spelling simply as b, d and q.

‘Why the q spelling?’ I hear you ask. Although English allows single sounds to be represented in its spelling by digraphs (i.e. two letters) (e.g. the /ŋ/ in sing, the /ð/ in there, the /θ/ in cough, etc.), Fijian spelling doesn’t because it’s reflecting the fact that it does not have consonant clusters in its pronunciation. The Fijian orthography (i.e. spelling system) was cleverly devised by the Methodist missionaries David Cargill and William Cross in 1835 so that it represented as closely as possible the way the language was pronounced. The Fijian orthography remains one of the best phonic spelling systems in the world.

So, if the stop sound /ɡ/ needs to be prenasalised and then represented by a single letter, what do we do given that the /ŋ/ sound also occurs in Fijian?

Cargill and Cross had a useful solution to hand. Since English had more letters in its alphabet (or orthography) than Fijian had distinct sounds, they had some letters (moveable type) in their type case to spare. Since the letter q was spare, the solution was to use the letter q to represent the /ŋɡ/ sound, and the letter g to represent the /ŋ/ sound. Hence we get Fijian toponyms and words spelled with a q (Bega /be̱gala/, Qata /ŋata/) and with a g (Sigatoka /sĩgatoka/, Galoa /ŋaloa/) which do not have the same pronunciation as the same letters in English. Quite a few Polynesian languages, in fact, use g to represent /ŋ/.

This explains why names like Nadi are pronounced as /nædɪ/ and not /nædu/. The Sydney suburb of Lakemba is named after the Fijian island Lakeba, pronounced /lakebɑ/. Since English doesn’t have prenasalised stops and allows consonant clusters, we render the name with an m in our spelling.

But wait—we’re not done yet with Fijian. Numerous toponyms and words are spelled with the letter c. This was another spare letter in the movable type case, so Cargill and Cross used it to represent the sound /θ/ (as in there and heather); so we have Moce /mɔθ/, Cakau /kɔθu/ etc.

Many Pacific languages have a closing quotation mark or apostrophe (‘’) in their spelling systems, and you will see names such as ‘Uvea, Vava’u, O’ahu, and even Hawai’i. This symbol represents a glottal stop /ʔ/, which is a consonant. The glottal stop is the sound you hear (or rather don’t hear!) in the Cockney rendering of butter as /baʔer/.\(^6\)

continued next page...
Many words and toponyms in Māori contain a wh in their spelling. We might think that this is pronounced as /w/. But no—in Māori it is pronounced as a /ɸ/ (i.e. a voiceless bilabial fricative). Hence, we have names such as Whangarei /ˌfaŋəɾei/, Whangara /ˌfaŋəɾa/. (Notice also that Māori spelling has not adopted the single symbol for the /ŋ/ sound, but uses ng instead.)

Unfamiliar spellings (at least to an English reader) are found also in Micronesia. For instance, the nation name Kiribati is pronounced /kɪrɪbəʃ/ not /kɪrɪbatɪ/. The country (which has a total land area of 800 square kilometres dispersed over 3.5 million square kilometres) derives its name from its old colonial name Gilbert Islands. Kiribati is the local way of writing Gilberts. Since the Kiribati language (also known as ‘Gilbertese’) does not have a /ŋ/ sound, but does have a /kl/ (very closely related to /ɡ/) the G of Gilberts is rendered as a K. Likewise, the language lacks the /l/ sound, but does have a close equivalent, /ɾ/, so the l in Gilberts is rendered as r. An intervening vowel is inserted between the r and b, because the language follows the Oceanic principle of generally not allowing consonant clusters.

Now, because the Kiribati language does not possess the phoneme /s/, it had to resort to another method of representing this sound without having to introduce a new letter in their orthography. Luckily it does have a /t/ phoneme and when it occurs before the vowel /i/ they are together pronounced as /si/. And that’s how Gilberts becomes Ki-ri-bati /kɪrɪbəʃ/. The nation also has an island as part of its dominion named Kirimiti which is derived, via the same process, from Christmas (Island) (not the one in the Indian Ocean that’s sadly been in the news these last few years).

I hope I haven’t perplexed you too much with the phonetics and phonology of Pacific island toponyms, and that you now have a better idea of how these and other words are pronounced.

Jan Tent

Endnotes

1 Sincere thanks to my good friend and colleague, Paul Geraghty, for ironing out a few errors and inconsistencies in an earlier version of this article.

2 When referring to vowels, I also include diphthongs (i.e. vowels formed whilst the tongue glides from one vowel position to another. They could well be called ‘gliding vowels’).

3 All examples are of toponyms.

4 A type of sound produced between spread lips, not between the bottom lip and the top teeth as in English. New Zealand English speakers, however, pronounce the wh as /f/ as in Fijian also has a bilabial fricative, but it is voiced /β/. It is very similar to /v/, hence Cargill and Cross used the letter v to represent it. Most English speakers pronounce Fijian words containing r with a /ɾ/.

5 a represents a long ‘ah’ sound.

6 The glottal stop is a type of consonantal sound produced by obstructing airflow in the vocal tract or, more precisely, the glottis (the space between the vocal folds). Although no actual sound is produced, nevertheless, it functions as a consonant in the sound system.

7 A ‘phoneme’ is a minimal unit of sound within a language’s sound system.

8 This specific process is called ‘assibilation’. It refers to a sound change resulting in a sibilant consonant (e.g. an /s/ or /ʃ/). The word assibilatio itself contains an example of the phenomenon, being pronounced /asibiləʃən/. The classical Latin -tio was pronounced /-tʃən/ (e.g. asibilatio was pronounced /asibiləʃətʃən/ and attentio /ətʃən/). However, in Vulgar Latin it assimilated to -tıol, and this can still be seen in Italian: attenzione. In French, it resulted in /ʒɔːl/, which in English then became /ʃəl/. The word asibilatio is known as an ‘autological’ word (also called ‘homological’ word or ‘autonym’) because it expresses a property that it also possesses.

9 ‘Phonetics’ is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of the production (i.e. articulation) and the acoustic nature of human speech sounds. ‘Phonology’ on the other hand, deals with the relationships of individual sounds and clusters of sounds at the level of syllables and words.
Orana: an Australian welcome?

In addition to the examples already given, during the 20th century Orana has been applied to name dozens of homesteads and other features of the built environment, as shown in the map above.

Without having looked into the origin of each of these, I expect that the namers have drawn on the booklets of the 1920s-70s.

So where did Thorpe and the other compilers get Orana from, if not from an Australian language? Well, the word is commonplace in the Cook Islands, even to the Rarotongan greeting Kia orāna being on their vehicle registration plates. Rarotongan orāna shares its stem with the Māori greeting Kia ora! But while Kia ora is somewhat known in Australia as a greeting, orāna is not, and orāna is not in Māori, and the Cook Islands are further away than New Zealand.

Even more distant is Tahitian Ia Orana ‘Hello’. So how might the Tahitian expression have come to the attention of W.W. Thorpe when he was compiling his 1921 booklet in Sydney? Here’s a possibility: the most famous use of Orana outside of Polynesia would have to be in Ia Orana Maria ‘Hail Mary, Ave Maria’, the title of Gaugin’s 1891 painting (which, we note, has its title...from page 1

continued next page
prominently within it). Contributing to the painting’s fame was that ‘It was very radical for Western painting to have a brown Madonna and Child; as a matter of fact papal allowance for this was not given until 1951’ according to one commentator.9

A young woman named Orana plays a central role in a story about Australians blackbirding through Pacific islands, ‘The Kidnappers’, which appeared in newspapers in 1898 and 189910. While this is just a minor appearance of the word in print in Australia a few years after the news of Gaugin’s 1891 painting, it does provide an example of one way the word arrived here.

Crana

The same booklet that introduced Orana has just one other ‘welcome’ word, Crana (Thorpe 1921, 2). Crana occurs only in Thorpe and Tyrrell’s booklets, in the 1920s and 1930s, and each also lists Orana, whereas Orana occurs in a number of other booklets, to 1980, without Crana (see the table below). And just as for Orana, I have not been able to find any Australian record of Crana prior to the 1920s booklets. Hence I take Crana to have originated with a misreading of the initial letter of Orana.

The Crana entry appears to have been drawn upon in at least one instance. Forrestfield Primary School opened in Perth in 1927, and Crana was added to the school crest:

In 1969/70 a competition was held for the design of a school crest. The present crest was the winning entry… The word ‘CRANA’ is Gaelic and was carried over from the original school and means ‘WELCOME’. (http://www.ffps.wa.edu.au/page/56/School-History)

Yes, Crana is a Gaelic word in that it is the name of a river in Ireland, which has given its name to a town, and

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<td>1980s</td>
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<td>Kenyon 1982</td>
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Table: Lineage of Orana ‘Welcome’, and Crana
...an Australian welcome?

for instance Crana College (founded 1925), on Crana Road, Buncrana, County Donegal. However there isn’t a word like crana ‘welcome’ in Gaelic.

Publication history

The table on the previous page shows the publication history of the two words in the naming booklets (and some newspaper reprints of excerptions). Notice that Crana was dropped from booklets after the 1930s, whereas Orana was retained through their period.

Conclusion

In modern Australian usage Orana has gone feral (even more than Akuna, Nash 2014), and has been anonymised from its linguistic and geographic origins. It is unclear how it arrived from Polynesia.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Bowern (2014) and Jeremy Steele for use of their lexical databases, and Geoscience Australia’s Gazetteer of Australia. [This article is edited from a blog post, ‘Orana: how did naming books welcome a Polynesian word as Australian?’ on the Endangered Languages and Cultures site, www.paradisec.org.au/blog, on 16 August 2015]

David Nash

Endnotes

1 Catholic Weekly 23 Dec 1948, page 2, Magazine Section.
3 There are fourteen business names in the region which are listed in the current Yellow Pages.
4 Greg Windsor (personal communication); and see reference Windsor 2013.
8 Image from: http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/438821
9 http://www.sedefscorner.com/2011/05/paul-gauguin-hail-mary-or-la-orana.html
10 Clarence and Richmond Examiner 3 Dec 1898, page 6, and Kalgoorlie Miner 13 March 1899, page 7, reprinted from The Australasian Pastoralist’ Review Vol VIII.

References


continued next page


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**David Nash** is a regular contributor to *Placenames Australia*. His most recent article was on *The Speewah*, in our March 2016 issue. He is a linguist specialising in the Aboriginal languages of Australia, and an expert on Warlpiri and other Northern Territory languages. He is a member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and Visiting Fellow of the Australian National University, Canberra.

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**The bridge with the longest name?**

In June 2013 we reported that the longest bridge in Australia, 3.2 km in length, was under construction to cross the Macleay floodplain in northern NSW. The Dhanggati Language Group, as part of its work to revitalise the language, had proposed a ‘very long name’ as an appropriate way of highlighting the nature of the bridge.

That proposal has now come to pass, and the sign is there for all to see. Congratulations to the Dhanggati Language Group, and thanks to Amanda Lissarague for telling us of this success (and for sending us the photo to prove it!)

**The Oops! Corner**

More than one reader spotted a slip in our previous issue’s *Reports from the Trenches* column. Melbourne’s Southern Cross Station was indeed formerly *Spencer Street Station*, not Flinders Street. Thanks to John Colville and Josh Nash, both quick off the mark!
Toponymy 101

Part 1

Placenames are so ubiquitous in our day-to-day lives that we rarely stop to consider the important role they play in society and the smooth running of that society. Most notably they are important to: navigation; delivery of post and goods; search and rescue operations; communications (including news media and weather reporting); disaster relief; cartography; national statistics (e.g. census taking); genealogy; tourism; security (including policing), intelligence gathering1 and peace-keeping; property rights; business and trade; urban and regional planning; cadastre… the list goes on.

One of the first questions one is asked when meeting someone new is ‘Where are you from?’ The answer, your place of origin or residence, forms an integral part of your personal identity. But placenames are also fundamental to a nation’s identity as well as its cultural and linguistic heritage, because they often encapsulate details about the geographic nature of a named feature, when it was named, and who bestowed it. They also offer insights into the belief and value systems of the name-givers, as well as the political and social circumstances at the time of naming (Tent & Slatyer, 2008a & b). And in many regions of the world, they reveal the chronology of exploration and settlement—Australia being an excellent example. In short, placenames and the history, geography, politics, economics and the linguistics of a region are all interconnected. So, therefore, with the current escalating tensions in the South China Sea, I thought it pertinent to consider the role placenames play in politics.

Firstly, naming a place is an ancillary to the appropriation of territory. For example, most names bestowed by the Dutch and the French between the 17th and early 19th centuries along the coast of Australia have been replaced by ones English explorers and colonists bestowed. But far more significantly, most indigenous Australian names have been ignored and/or replaced by introduced ones. Note, less than one third of the placenames found on maps of Australia have an indigenous element, and even fewer are fully and genuinely indigenous (Tent 2011).

There are many motivations for renaming a place. One present-day incentive is to reinstate indigenous names on significant sights and places by initially dual naming. These have included Uluru / Ayers Rock and Kata Tjuta / Mount Olga. The background and history to dual naming in NSW is described by Greg Windsor (2009), who explains the policy was established in 2001, and that the first gazetted dual names were Dawes Point / Tar-ra in 2002 and South Creek / Wianamatta in 2003. Hodges (2007: 395) explains that these namings were followed in 2005 by a group of 20 more names on Sydney Harbour, based on the research of Attenbrow (2009). And in 2012, there were calls for the renaming of Lake Eyre back to its indigenous name Kati Thanda, implemented last year.

Other motives for renaming include the rezoning or merging of suburbs and shires etc., or the confederation or separation of states etc. Some places have been renamed because the original name was considered no longer socially appropriate. For example, the recent move to rename Mount Niggerhead in Victoria. Or the controversy surrounding the renaming of the E.S. ‘Nigger’ Brown Stand at Toowoomba Sports Ground. Another nice example, from Spain, is the village of Asquerosa (literally ‘disgusting, repulsive, revolting’) which was renamed Valderrubio in 1943.

Sometimes, places get renamed for a publicity stunt or for sponsorship. The Victorian town of Speed was renamed for a short time to SpeedKills; and then there was the renaming of the North Queensland Cowboys rugby league team’s home ground to 1300miles Stadium. The town of Ismay (Montana, USA) unofficially took the name of Joe, Montana, after the NFL quarterback Joe Montana, as part of a 1993 publicity stunt. Not to be beaten, the town of Halfway (Oregon, USA) changed its name to Half.com, accepting money from a dot-com to change its name to match the web site ‘Half.com’.

Sometimes a place is renamed by mistake. Recently Google Maps accidentally revived the name Adolf-Hitler-Platz in Berlin for the correct name Theodor-Heuss-Platz.

However, the most common motivation for renaming is political—and we’ll have to leave this aspect of placename-power until our next issue!

Jan Tent

‘If you want to make enemies, try to change something’
-Woodrow Wilson

see references next page...
We thought you’d never ask!

Have you noticed how we often take some of Australia’s most well-known placenames for granted? We assume they must be of Aboriginal origin; but we don’t stop to think further about how they came to be. **Jeremy Steele** again takes up the challenge, to tell us more about these placenames.

**Bondi**

Tyrell and McCarthy are two of a number of people who compiled and published lists of Aboriginal placenames together with their meanings, and both give ‘Water breaking over rocks’ as the meaning for Bondi. Most such lists gave no indication of language, precise area, or source for the meaning. Tyrell and McCarthy both give the identical interpretation. Perhaps they are right. But is there anything in the records to suggest otherwise?

The first issue is that Bondi has the letters -nd- together. William Dawes, the greatest student of the Sydney language at the time it was first encountered by Europeans, specifically stated that the somewhat similar consonantal combination -nb- was not permitted in the language, and that it was replaced by -nm-. He also indicated that -nd- was not used in Sydney either, although the same words did use the combination further inland.

However, in spite of Dawes’ prescriptions, other -nd-words do occur in various Sydney and Dharug lists, which might give hints to as to the meaning of Bondi. A few examples follow. (Note that /o/ is not used in transcriptions for most Aboriginal languages, nor is /e/).
Our clues refer to well-known figures from the Bible (from both the Old and New Testaments).
e.g. (QLD, reef) he was tested when every possible disaster happened to him and his family, though all was made right in the end... Job Reef

1. (QLD, mountain) the first High Priest of the Israelites, and Moses’ older brother and spokesman
2. (QLD, creek) the disciple who kissed Jesus
3. (TAS, lake) the progenitor complicit in the ‘Fall of Man’
4. (TAS, gorge) the shepherd who was the first murder victim
5. (QLD, headland) he built a boat to save his family
6. (WA, headland) God declared he would be known as the ‘father of many nations’
7. (WA, creek) he accompanied Moses on his ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments
8. (TAS, lake) hers is the most famous parthenogenesis of all
9. (TAS, lake) the first temptress, and a palindrome too
10. (TAS, mountain) he had a vision of a ladder reaching into heaven
11. (QLD, river) he was almost sacrificed on the altar by his father Abraham
12. (QLD, town) she hid her baby brother in the bulrushes; (poetic) valley.
13. (VIC, mountain) wife and half-sister of Abraham
14. (QLD, mountain) the carpenter who travelled to Bethlehem for the census
15. (QLD, creek) the first murderer
16. (VIC, mountain) she favoured her younger son and planned her husband’s deception
17. (TAS, creek) Jacob’s second wife
18. (TAS, bay) the prophet whose journey to Nineveh had a fishy terminus
19. (WA, mountain) the Bible’s only female judge
20. (QLD, mountain) he led the exodus of the Israelites

References

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Alternatively, use our website to contact us: www.anps.org.au/contact.html

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Membership Details

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☐ I wish to become/remain an individual member of Placenames Australia ......................... $25
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We say thank you to...

our corporate sponsor, the Geographical Names Board of NSW — and to the Secretary of the Board, Michael Van Den Bos. This year’s newsletters could not have been published without the support of the GNB.

Contributions

Contributions for Placenames Australia are welcome. Please send all contributions to the Editor, David Blair, by email:<br>
<editor@anps.org.au>

Supporting photographs or other illustrations are greatly appreciated.

Closing dates for submissions are:
March Issue: 15 January  September Issue: 15 July
June Issue: 15 April  December Issue: 15 October